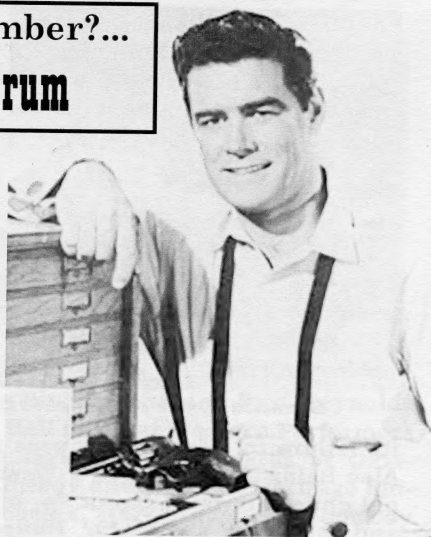


Do You Remember?...

## Jefferson Drum

Jefferson Drum (Jeff Richards) arrived in the small town of Jubilee with his young son Joey planning to book passage to San Francisco. Embittered over the loss of his wife, who was murdered, and the loss of his newspaper, Drum is looking to start life again in a new locale. But, in the first episode, "Arrival" (which actually was initially broadcast as the final episode of NBC's "The Web" on 10/6/57 as "Man With a Choice"), when Drum encounters a local gunfighter (Royal Dano) who has murdered the publisher of Jubilee's newspaper, he decides to stay and fight him—and other injustices. Actually, the series resulted from a misunderstanding. In 1957, Goodson-Todman and Screen Gems contracted to film 13 episodes of "The Web" as a summer replacement for "The Loretta Young Show", then learned Loretta would be off the air for 14 weeks. The gap was filled with "Man With a Choice", a half-hour original Western in which Jeff Richards starred as a gold rush newspaper editor. The episode became the test film of "Jefferson Drum" which then went to series. Based on characters created by Walter B. Newman, the half-hour, black and white frontier journalism series "Jefferson Drum" was set in the 1850s as Drum took over THE STAR in Jubilee, a wide-open Western gold mining town. The producer was Matthew Rapf. Usual writer was E. Jack Neuman with most episodes directed by Harmon Jones. Although Drum believed the pen was mightier than the sword he was certainly adept with a Colt or his fists when need be, but Drum preferred to fight lawless elements with editorial words. Besides his son, Joey (Eugene Martin), Drum was aided by noted character actor Cyril Delevanti as Lucius Coin, his printer, and Robert J. Stevenson as friendly bartender, Big Ed. "Jefferson Drum" was a midseason replacement for the failing "Court of Last Resort" on NBC's Friday night lineup as of April 25, 1958. The Goodson-Todman series produced through Screen Gems never really had a chance with NBC programming it up against two already established 8pm EST Western series, "Trackdown" on CBS (started in '57) and "Jim Bowie" (began in '56). After 14 episodes, NBC moved "Drum" up a half hour to 7:30 Eastern where it simply was in worse competition opposite "Rin Tin Tin" on ABC and "Trouble With Father" on CBS. In a last ditch effort, NBC tried "Drum" at 7:30 on Thursday as counterprogramming to CBS' powerhouse "I



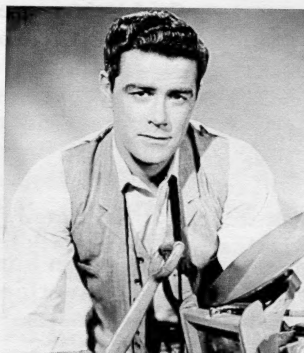
Delevanti, Richards, Stevenson.

Love Lucy" and "Leave It to Beaver" on ABC. By December 11, 1958, after 26 episodes originals ceased and the timeslot was filled with repeats until April '59 at which time NBC and Drum 'published' their final edition. Richards died at Victor Valley Community Hospital in Victorville, CA of acute respiratory failure due to pneumonia on July 28, 1989. He was 64. Cyril Delevanti died at December 13, 1975, of lung cancer. Robert J. Stevenson died at 60 on March 4, 1975 of cardiac arrest. Child actor Eugene Martin (real last name Mazzola) acted from '50-'73. After military service from '68-'70 he began working behind the camera, joining the Directors Guild in '76. \* \* I contacted Eugene Martin and he told me, "I didn't do the pilot, someone else did (another child actor) but that didn't work out, so they brought me in on episode 2. I was under contract to Screen Gems during that time. For me the series was a great experience. I had done a lot of Westerns. I had learned how to ride a horse on 'Walk the Proud Land' (under his real name Eugene Mazzola.—ed.) with Audie Murphy. On 'Jefferson Drum' I was 10 years old at the time



there was a big thing in the L.A. TIMES about signing me. The show was produced by Goodson-Todman. They weren't typical TV producers, they were game show producers. As I remember, they felt there was too much violence on TV at the time so they were hoping to create a show with less violence. The original title was 'The Quill and the Man'. The byline was 'He fought with a pen'. He was supposed to fight the bad guys though his printing press. As far as locations, we had a Western street out in Topanga Canyon. Jeff had a lot of promise, he was a strong actor but he was going through a lot of turmoil in his personal life which I wasn't fully aware of at the time. It was known he had some personal problems he was dealing with, but he was always professional on set and we had a great time. I knew he drank a lot because he was given B-12 injections on Mondays so he could function, but otherwise he was great to work with. Robert J. Stevenson was the bartender...he was an L.A. Councilman at the time, and the old guy was Cyril Delevanti. Both of those guys were solid, solid TV actors.

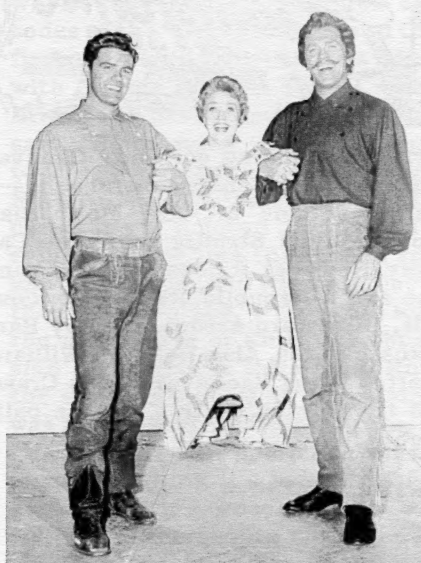
I had a blast on that show. It was the only time, really, that I was in the studio system."



**BORN RECKLESS**  
**THE RISE AND DOWNFALL**  
**OF JEFF RICHARDS**  
by Samuel Clemens

One of the most prominent—yet simultaneously obscure—stars in the Western genre was a handsome actor named Jeff Richards who starred

on 26 half hour episodes of "Jefferson Drum" in 1958. Once a familiar face after his breakthrough onscreen role in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" ('54) that earned him a Golden Globe Award, he has since faded into relative obscurity. Although he certainly never achieved the cult status of John Wayne or Robert Mitchum, he was an icon of masculinity. In addition to acting, he was a vocalist, an all-star athlete, and a veteran. He was gifted in a lot of ways but plagued by alcoholism and depression. He's an unrecognized talent and is deserving of this tribute. Richard Mansfield Brooks was born November 1, 1924 in Portland, OR. He spent his childhood in Tacoma, WA with his siblings and was later adopted by their stepfather. His passion was sports, not the performing arts. He'd hoped to play Major League Baseball, but enlisted in the U.S. Navy instead, where he served in World War II. He first considered acting in 1945 while touring Paramount Pictures with a friend. An agent with Warner Bros. approached him and asked if he was interested in acting. Richards was skeptical, but kept the agent's contact information. Upon returning from active duty in 1946, he played Triple-A League Baseball for the Portland Beavers and the Salem Senators until a torn ligament forced him into an early retirement. It was then he decided to contact that agent. Following a screen test he landed a contract with Warner Bros. A lot of his earlier roles were walk-ons, typically in sports-themed movies such as "Kill the Umpire" ('50), "Angels in the Outfield" ('51) and "The Big Leaguer" ('53). As he progressed as an actor, he reportedly (although there is no concrete evidence for this) rejected offers by the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Yankees to return to baseball. He left Warner Bros. and did movies with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox before being offered a long-term contract with MGM who promised him stardom. They cast him in "The Strip" ('51) and "The Bad and the Beautiful" ('52) as well as "Lone Star" ('52) his first Western-themed production. But Richards grew frustrated, as he felt MGM had kept him on as a bit player. A lot of his roles were forgettable and usually uncredited. He was ready to walk out on the industry until he was cast in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" ('54) playing the role



Richards, Jane Powell, Howard Keel, "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers".

keep up with everyone else. He was a team player." It became Richards' greatest success earning him a Golden Globe Award for Best Newcomer. MGM gave him more big-budget movies including "It's a Dog's Life" ('55), "The Opposite Sex" ('56) and "Don't Go Near the Water"

of Benjamin, one of the seven brothers. He felt miscast as he couldn't dance, but audiences loved him. Russ Tamblyn recalled, "Michael Kidd wanted everyone in 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers' to be dancers, but he had to compromise. Jeff Richards and I weren't trained dancers, but we did just fine. I had some experience in tumbling, so choreography wasn't foreign to

me. Jeff worked really hard though to

('57), while doing sporadic roles on television. Richards would later acknowledge that MGM was right in not giving him starring roles immediately, saying to columnist Erskine Johnson, "Now that I look back, I see how unready I was. If the studio had let me grab the big roles as I wanted to, I might have stumbled through them and killed myself as an actor." Actress Barrie Chase stated "We were at MGM together. He was the talk of the town. He couldn't really sing or dance, but they did everything they could to accommodate him. He was a gentleman...he didn't have an ego and he never made a pass at anyone." As the popularity of musicals declined, MGM changed their strategy in building Richards' career. They cast him in "The Marauders" ('55) opposite Dan Duryea, a seldom seen Western where he starred as Corey Everett, a heroic cowboy who tries to survive in the desert as gunfighters attempt to evict him. Richards was ecstatic, as Western lore was a hobby of his and he'd hoped for years to be a part of it. He attributed this opportunity to having "the physique to fill the boots and saddle." After filming concluded, he starred in another Western, "Many Rivers to Cross" ('55) alongside former co-star Russ Tamblyn. Richards saw an opportunity to pursue this ageless genre, and the critics agreed. Mike Connolly wrote that it was Richards' 'big break' while Hedda Hopper called him "tall, dark, and vital." Even Humphrey Bogart, who was a sailing buddy of his, described him (and Marlon Brando) as some of the rare talented younger actors in Hollywood. He was at the height of his career, and he hadn't even reached 30. Richards married Shirley Sibre, a model whom he met while vacationing in Florida, but it was a short-lived marriage, they divorced months later. He later married Vicki Lenore Flaxman, a champion surfer. They had a daughter together named Nina. After their divorce, Vicki, who said the failed marriage resulted from Richards' alcoholism, married Van Williams who would achieve success on "The Green Hornet". After losing the starring role in "Walk a Tightrope", Richards felt MGM was no longer interested in him. He was released from his contract in April 1957 on the condition he repay \$4,400 of his salary, later saying, "I wanted to be free to chart my own course. Right now, I'm interested in doing an adventure series on television." Now able to pursue acting without the restrictions of a studio, he was planning to fly to New York to audition for a series with Phil Silvers when he was contacted by Jack Warner of Warner Bros., who gave him the



Jarma Lewis and Jeff Richards wait before their next scene in "The Marauders".

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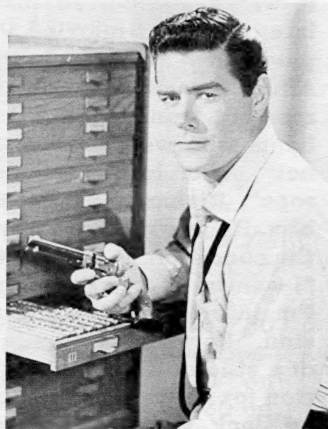
opportunity to star in two big-budget movies. Jerry Leisger remembered, "He was one of the greatest actors of the '50s. I owned a hotel in New York City for decades, which was a popular place for celebrities. I decorated one of the rooms with posters and memorabilia of Jeff Richards in his honor." Warner Bros. cast him in "Island of the Lost Women" ('58) with June Blair and "Born Reckless" ('58) with Mamie Van Doren, which, unlike prior Westerns he starred in, required him to learn a lot



"Born Reckless"—Jeff Richards and Mamie Van Doren.

of stunts that included riding a horse and lassoing an animal. It was a difficult several weeks for Richards that included him accidentally tying his hand to a calf's hoof and crashing his car in the midst of a desert sandstorm. Although "Born Reckless" was by no means given critical acclaim, it was a modest success and is best known for a choreographed altercation between its stars Mamie Van Doren and Carol Ohmart in what THE DAILY NEWS hailed as "the roughest, toughest screen fight of the year." Richards was offered two TV series, a drama and a Western. He chose the Western, which would be called "Jefferson Drum". It was a great script with an original premise involving a widower with a son who becomes a newspaper editor in the fictional town of Jubilee. Throughout the series, he balances fatherhood while exposing corruption in his community. Richards emphasized the uniqueness of the series by saying to columnist Bob Thomas, "It's not really like other TV Westerns. I play a newspaper editor who tries to solve situations without a gun, if possible." The series premiered April 25, 1958 to positive reviews. The ratings were steady, but could've been better had it not aired opposite at first "Trackdown" and "Jim Bowie" and later "I Love Lucy" and "Leave it to Beaver". The series, unbeknownst to Richards, concluded on December 11, 1958. It was months later when columnist Cynthia Lowry announced its unexpected cancellation resulting from the network's reshuffling of several series. A lot of fans were confused as to why it was cancelled, but nobody was more distraught than Richards himself. Although he felt the series had a lot of promise he continued chasing the fading dream which was no more than several TV appearance which included "Laramie" and "Rawhide". He turned to alcohol as his career declined, later saying, "I drank like an S.O.B." He did construction, security, and landscaping to pay his expenses. His daughter, Nina Fox, stated, "My father's

biggest downfall in his career was that he was too handsome, and studios didn't know what to do with him. I find it odd that he did a lot of Westerns, as he was raised in the Pacific Northwest...you wouldn't expect a guy from Portland, OR to ride horses and use a lasso." Richards left Hollywood and lived in Miami where he did odd jobs that included security and manual labor. He was not happy with it though. He'd grown tired of Hollywood, as he felt the industry was changing. He expressed frustration that masculinity onscreen was fading, saying in an interview with Vernon Scott that "you rarely see a young actor in a picture who isn't better at crying than fighting...this new breed of sensitive actors doesn't reflect American men at all." Jeff Richards prepared for a triumphant comeback when co-star and close friend Howard Keel offered him a role in the A. C. Lyles produced "Waco" ('66), a Western involving a gunfight solving the murder of the town's sheriff. Richards was no longer the virile athletic specimen audiences looked for, but he was still handsome and distinguished. He had a nationally syndicated exposé about Richards that was written by Bob Thomas, Richards promoted it as a comeback. It didn't do a lot to salvage his career though. His onscreen career was over, and he retired to the Mojave Desert where the cost of living was more affordable. He had an ex-girlfriend who kept in touch and visited frequently, but otherwise he was reclusive. As his health began to fail, he made amends with family, friends, co-stars of his, and repaired his relationship with his daughter. He died on July 28, 1989 of heart failure in Culver City, CA at the age of 64.



## ?? BUT IS IT A WESTERN? ?

When a hit tune, "Honeychile", is being used by an eastern radio station, the music publisher suddenly discovers they do not own the song and send city slicker Eddie

JUDY SINGIN'! JUDY DANCIN'!  
JUDY ROMANCIN'!



Foy Jr. to con the writer, Wyoming gal Judy Canova into signing a legal contract. Judy sings several songs, including an ear-busting version of "Rag Mop" that nearly made me stop watching! Strictly cornpone nova comedy all the way. However, it does include a runaway buckboard scene and a Republic staple—the covered wagon race finale. B-Western actors like Roy Croft, Fuzzy Knight, Roscoe Ates, Alan Hale Jr., William Fawcett, Trevor Bardette, Irving Bacon and John Ford pop up here and there, making this a close call but—still no sombrero!



YES



NO

## COWBOY QUOTES:

Buster Crabbe: "If you can believe it, we started my movie for PRC on Monday and had it in the can on Thursday! That's when I decided I'd had enough and quit. I went in and told them I was through. They didn't even bat an eye. The next thing I knew they replaced me with Lash LaRue."